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ABSTRACT

Quality communication is hindered with incorrect spelling of words. Thus, it behooves the teacher to develop a quality spelling curriculum for all students to become the best spellers possible to be able to communicate well in writing. The scope of the spelling curriculum answers the question pertaining to the "breadth" of spelling words to be spelled correctly by students, whereas the concept "sequence" stresses when students will encounter selected words to master in spelling. Some basal spelling textbooks may describe the scope and sequence in spelling, but using a spelling textbook has advantages and disadvantages. An individualized spelling approach would identify the words misspelled by a student as representing the scope in the curriculum. Sequence would depend upon the order of the arranged words as to when they will be studied for spelling mastery. Many basal readers list the new words, in the Manual, for an ensuing story to be read by students. These suggested new words could become a list for students to master in spelling. Spelling words might also come from social studies or science units of study. (NKA)

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Scope and Sequence in the Spelling Curriculum.

by Marlow Ediger

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SCOPE AND SEQUENCE IN THE SPELLING CURRICULUM

Too frequently the complaint has been that pupils do not spell words correctly when writing, or pupils do not spell words as well as formerly. Whether this is true or not has not been documented. However, pupils do need to learn to spell words correctly if long hand is used or the word processor is the tool used to spell words correctly in written communication. Quality communication is hindered with incorrect spelling of words. If the word processor is used, spell checkers will provide help in spelling words correctly if the writer is close enough in spelling any word correctly. If the word being spelled is inaccurate, the pupil needs to be close enough to the correct spelling, for the word processor to offer possible correct choices for the incorrect word to be changed. Then too, all written work needs proofing carefully, since spell checkers will not discern between and among homonyms needed in written work. Thus, it behooves the teacher to develop a quality spelling curriculum for all pupils to become the best spellers possible to be able to communicate well in writing.

The scope of the spelling curriculum answers the question pertaining to the breadth of spelling words to be spelled correctly by pupils, whereas the concept sequence stresses when pupils will encounter selected words to master in spelling (Ediger, 1997, Chapter Six).

Positive pupil attitudes toward correct spelling of words are a necessity. Tiedt (1983) wrote the following pertaining to developing positive attitudes on the part of pupils toward spelling:

1. Are the words being studied of interest to my pupils?
2. Are able spellers held down to a low level of achievement?
3. Am I spending too much time on spelling activities?
4. Are poor spellers receiving help as needed?
5. Am I reinforcing spelling through composition?
6. Do I vary techniques of teaching spelling? Is spelling "dull"? Are student attitudes positive?
7. Am I really "teaching" spelling?"
8. Do I permit spelling to inhibit creative writing?
9. Are techniques of teaching spelling based on the findings of research?
10. Are spelling and reading skills introduced together so children see the relationship?

Scope and Sequence in Spelling

The scope of the spelling curriculum answers the question of what pupils need to learn in spelling. How broad then should the spelling curriculum be in terms of breadth of content? There are several selected choices which the teacher or school need to consider.

First, there are language arts specialists who advocate that a research based spelling curriculum be in emphasis. Several attempts have been made in researching the most commonly used words pupils use in writing. One very excellent study made was by Edward W. Dolch (1955) known as the Dolch list. Two hundred twenty words were identified as the most common words misspelled by pupils. These were listed by grade levels. Over the years, teachers from many school districts have emphasized pupils learn to spell these words correctly. In fact, the author has been asked by former students where they can get a hold of the Dolch list of 220 words to be used in the spelling curriculum. A core of spelling words may then be used for pupils to master. How these are to be taught would be up to the teacher. Learners need to be motivated in learn to spell as many words correctly as possible. A research based list of words, in part, then may provide for the scope of the spelling curriculum. The learning opportunities necessary for pupils to spell these words correctly must be developed by the teacher. The sequence or order of spelling each word correctly needs to be decided upon by the classroom teacher. The following are presented as guidelines to be used by the teacher in ascertaining the scope and sequence in pupils learning to spell words:

1. pupils need to be successful learners. Too many words to master in spelling might well make for feelings of failure on the part of pupils. Too few words for pupil mastery may well make for boredom and a lack of challenge.
2. activities to achieve objectives in the correct spelling of words must be interesting to make for active engagement by pupils.
3. purpose must be involved for pupils to learn in the correct spelling of words. The teacher may state a purpose or pupils may be asked what the reason might be for learning to spell a given set of words.
4. individual differences need to be provided for. The number of words each is asked to master needs to harmonize with personal ability levels of achievement.
5. pupils need to be motivated to learn. Intrinsic or

extrinsic means of motivation may then be in the offing (Ediger and Rao, 2000, Chapter Eight).

Second, a basal spelling textbook used in teaching pupils may describe the scope and sequence in spelling. The basal must be carefully chosen by a committee of classroom teachers. Ideally, the basal chosen should harmonize with the objectives of the school spelling program. Generally, a reputable spelling textbook is divided into weekly units of study. Each spelling unit of study consists of a list of words which pupils are to master within a week. The weekly unit may have a title or theme. There are learning activities for each unit directly in the pupil's textbook. These activities help pupils in learning to spell each word. The evaluation procedures are also given in the teacher's manual which accompanies the text. Advantages given in using a spelling textbook in guiding pupil learning in spelling are the following:

1. there are a structured set of words listed for pupils to achieve on a weekly basis.
2. the learning activities have already been planned and listed for each weekly list of words to be mastered. The teacher may use these in teaching, in whole or in part, as well as use his/her own activities.
3. the evaluation plan is also listed to ascertain pupil achievement in spelling. The plan may be used as deemed important.

Disadvantages in using a textbook to teach spelling are the following:

1. less structure is desired from selected pupils in learning to spell words (See Searson and Dunn, 2001).
2. the words listed for each week may not be those needed in functional writing by pupils. Pupils are individuals and these differences need to be provided for.
3. the spelling textbook needs to be supplemented wish other sources in the curriculum.

Individualized Spelling

Since pupils are individuals, they may need to experience individualized spelling approaches. Here, each pupil and the teacher need to keep accurate record of words misspelled by the former. Misspelled words then become a part of the list for pupil mastery per week or other segment of time. Poor spellers misspell many words and they may need to have the number

adjusted for mastery per week. In other words, they do need to feel successful in test results and not develop further feelings of failure.

A major problem in testing pupils on words spelled incorrectly from a given set is that these same words, when spelled correctly, may be misspelled a short time later in functional writing. This is a problem for the pupil and the teacher to face and work toward a solution.

The method used in learning to spell words may be at fault. The teacher then needs to assist pupils to use a recommended methodology. The following steps in learning to spell a word has been found to be successful with selected learners:

1. look at the word, to master, carefully by noticing the sequence of letters.
2. cover the word and mentally "see the word."
3. look at the word again to notice if the mental spelling was correct.
4. write the word once and then check with the correct spelling.
5. practice writing the word several times until mastery.

individualized spelling would identify those words misspelled by a pupil as representing the scope in the curriculum. Sequence would depend upon the order of the arranged words as to when they will be studied for spelling mastery. From the easiest to those gradually more complex is a guideline to follow in pupils learning to spell words correctly within the framework of individualized spelling (See Ediger, 1997, 88-89).

Spelling Words From the Reading Textbook

Many basal readers list the new words, in the Manual, for an ensuing story to be read by pupils. These suggested new words could become a list for pupils to master in spelling. They also could be used as bonus words for pupils who excel in spelling, or for those who wish to master additional words than those contained in a spelling textbook, for example. The number to be mastered per week would depend on the ability of each learner. The teacher needs to plan and implement learning opportunities so that pupils may master these words successfully. There would be no Manual here on ways to proceed in having pupils master the correct spelling of words. A Manual, however, if available for a spelling textbook, can be helpful in providing suggestions in how to teach mastery of a

suggested list of spelling words. Teachers may use these activities flexibly and adapt them for many spelling lessons.

Advantages for using the new words from a basal for pupil mastery in spelling are the following:

1. it would assist pupils to identify words correctly in reading.
2. it would meet two goals at one time, such as spelling and reading selected words correctly.
3. it would provide additional security to pupils by having the same list of words to master for both spelling and reading.

Disadvantages for using the same set of words for two curriculum areas of reading and spelling are the following:

1. it might lack challenge for good readers and good spellers. Here, the teacher may make adjustments by having bonus words and/or a different set of words for the two curriculum areas whereby the talented learner may achieve more optimally.
2. it might not meet spelling needs in personal words used in writing. New words to master in reading and spelling might not be the words needed for written communication.
3. it minimizes personal contextual words which pupils need to learn to spell correctly (Ediger, 1993, 17- 20).

Spelling words might also come from social studies or science units of study. Words chosen need to be relevant and utilitarian for pupils in their own writing experiences.

Conclusion

Each of the above named plans in teaching spelling may be used in combination with one or more other plans. Thus, for example, research based words may become a part of the weekly list of spelling words for pupil mastery from the basal. They could also be used in combination with individualized spelling, as well as new words from the basal reader used as words for pupil mastery. The language arts teacher needs to be flexible in planning the scope and sequence of the spelling curriculum. A challenging, yet achievable, spelling curriculum needs to be in the offing. There are a plethora of games which the teacher may design to make spelling an interesting experience for pupils. Ford and Opitz (2002) present the following idea for a scavenger hunt:

Find three words in our room that ...

1. have more than six letters.

2. end in "ing" where the final letter was doubled.
3. mean the same as "said."
4. have the same sound pattern as "boat."
5. are words from math.
6. start with "sh."
7. have the same spelling pattern as "nice."
8. are contractions.
9. rhyme with "she."

The above might well be adapted to any list of spelling words being studied or on any developmental level of pupils. For example in number one above, the number of letters could be adapted to where pupils are achieving presently. For number two above, pupils might locate words ending in "ing" or "ed." In number three above, pupils could locate a synonym of a different word than "said." The teacher needs to think of creative learning opportunities which might well assist pupils to achieve vital objectives in spelling.

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